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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

WEEKLY SUMMARY

Special Report

The Yugoslav Power Structure Under Revision

Secret

No. 44

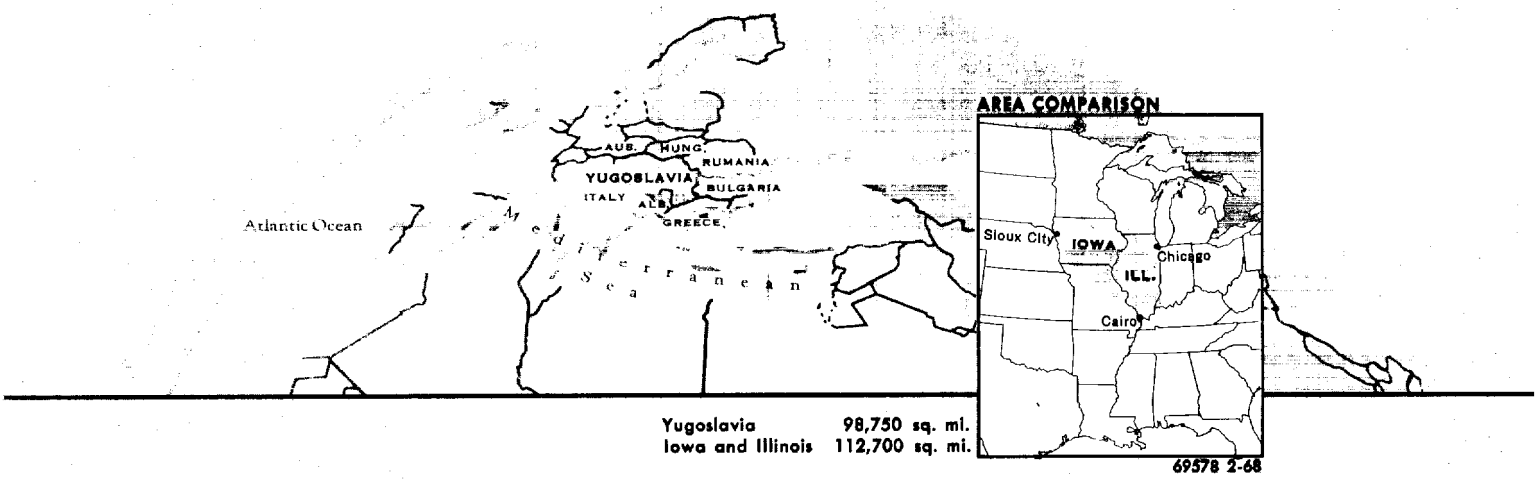
23 February 1968
No. 0008/68A

THE YUGOSLAV POWER STRUCTURE UNDER REVISION

Tito's central goal in his declining years is to establish party and government institutions capable of responding to Yugoslavia's problems in years to come. To that end he has extensively reorganized the party and government organizations, has made some important personnel shifts, and has instituted numerous political and economic reforms. His hope of bequeathing unity and a sound economy to the country, however, is beset by increasing difficulties and does not seem likely to be fully realized.

Despite these changes in the party and government in the last 18 months, Tito still is compelled to rely as much as ever on his old-time associates to keep his reform program going and to maintain discipline in the party. No political heir has appeared, and none is in prospect, to fill the vacuum created in 1966 when Tito ousted his second-in-command, Aleksandar Rankovic. National economic and political rivalries among the republics are increasing and threaten the delicate power balance Tito has engineered to protect his own position and to forward his programs. In the circumstances, Tito's death or incapacity probably would result in a period of turmoil in Yugoslavia.

YUGOSLAVIA



Institutional Changes

Since July 1966, the upper echelons of both party and government have been replaced by an organizational apparatus designed to prevent power from again being concentrated in the hands of a few individuals.

In the party, the four-member secretariat, through which Tito, Rankovic, Edvard Kardelj, and Veljko Vlahovic had run the country was disbanded, and the 19-man executive committee that served as a politburo was stripped of its responsibility to formulate policy. This responsibility was vested instead in a new 35-member presidium. A new 11-member executive committee was set up, but was given authority only for seeing that policy is carried out, and for overseeing day-to-day activities. In the government, the position of vice president, held by Rankovic and from which he expected to succeed Tito, was abolished, and the executive apparatus revamped. The once powerful heir apparent has drifted into the obscurity of retirement.

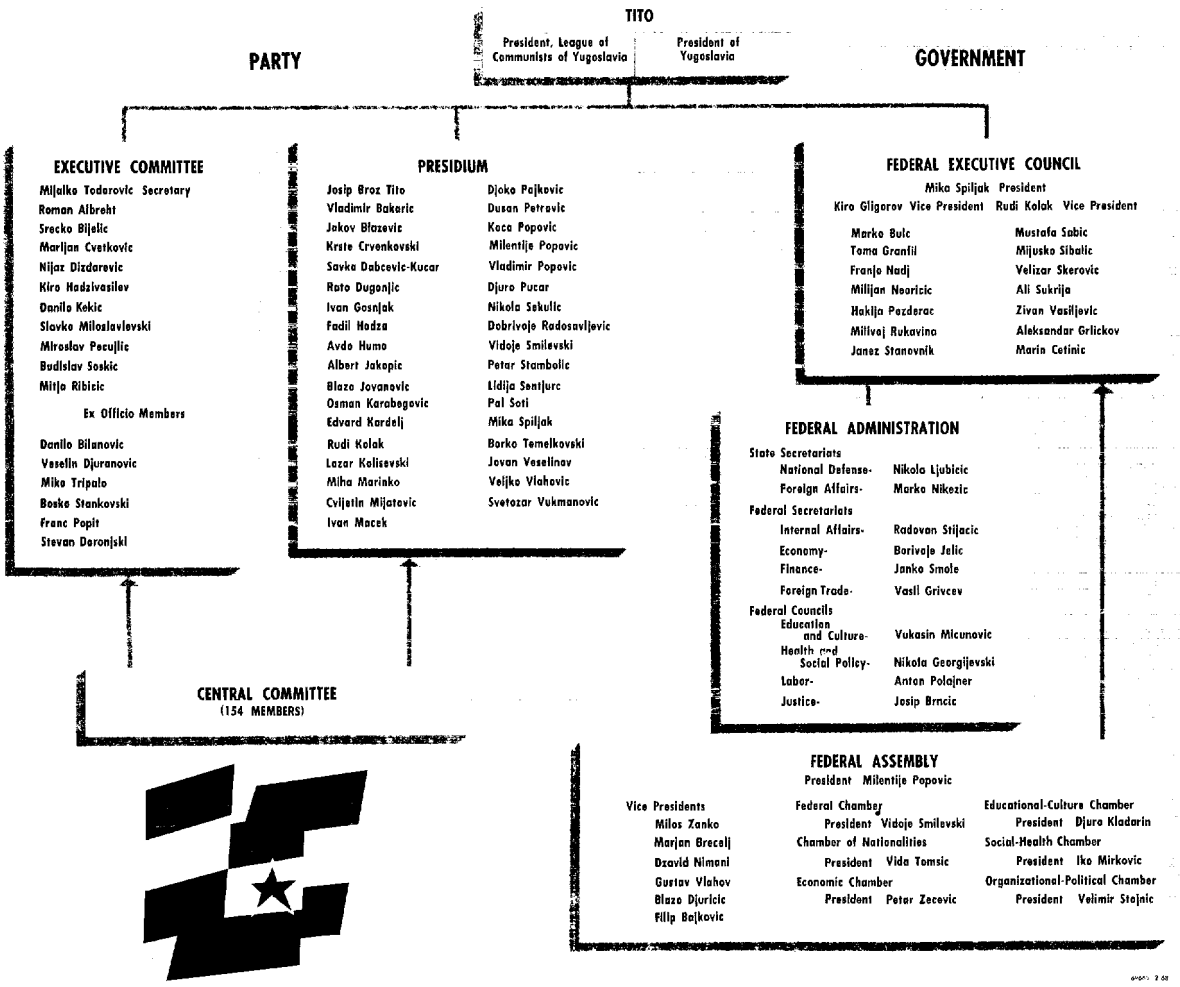
The Power Balance in the Party

Personnel changes that accompanied these reorganizations have created a fragile balance of power between liberal and conservative factions in the regime. The party presidium, by virtue of its composition the most important party body, contains most of Tito's old cronies who have helped him rule Yugoslavia for the past 20 years. Some of these veterans are influential conservatives who have passively, if not actively, opposed Tito's economic and political reform program that got under way in earnest in 1965. Instead of ousting these officials from the presidium, however, Tito considerably diluted their influence by bringing into it 16 newcomers of liberal persuasion.

The younger, proreform officials brought into the party's new executive committee also help to counterbalance the conservative influence in the presidium. Its secretary, Mijalko Todorovic, is the only holdover from the old committee and is closely identified with the reforms. Although the executive committee lacks the prestige of the presidium, its members probably hope to use their authority to supervise the day-to-day activities of the party to manipulate the reorganization of the local party bodies now under way.

Tito's Status

Ruling over this delicate balance of liberal and conservative factions, the 75-year-old Tito remains the most powerful figure in the regime. This power, however, is far from absolute. He cannot, for example, risk many such showdowns as the one over the Rankovic ouster, because of the effects on the sharp rivalries that already exist between the various party factions and between the nationalities. Tito therefore uses his power sparingly and steers a middle course between liberals who seek faster, more far-reaching reforms, and conservatives who wish to recentralize all authority.



The Positions of Others

The chief benefactors in the personnel and organizational changes of the last 18 months have been Mijalko Todorovic and Mika Spiljak. Todorovic briefly replaced Rankovic in the now abolished party secretariat and now is number two man. He has much less authority, however, than his predecessor. He does not control the secret police, as did Rankovic, and has not had time to build a following within his native Serbian party. Moreover, any attempt by Todorovic to build a political machine probably would lead to countermeasures by suspicious rivals in the presidium.

Spiljak rose from premier of Croatia to become federal premier. His rise is all the more impressive because the highest federal-level office he ever held before June 1963 was that of vice president of the Yugoslav trade union confederation.

Most of the apparent losers in the government and party reshuffle in reality have lost little political power or influence. Although Edvard Kardelj no longer is a party secretary nor president of the federal assembly, he is a presidium member and probably Tito's closest adviser. Vlahovic, a former party secretary, was in relative eclipse during the period shortly after the fall of Rankovic until the outbreak of the Middle East crisis in June 1967. His pro-Soviet reputation then made him useful to Tito in cooperating with the USSR. Although he probably dislikes some aspects of the reform program, his recent appointment as head of the Belgrade party organization underlines his importance to Tito.

The position of former defense secretary Ivan Gosnjak is still unclear. He too was transferred from the old executive committee to the presidium, but he lost his government job and his position as head of the party apparatus in the army. As Tito's hand-picked deputy on the Council of National Defense, however, Gosnjak probably has as much control over the army as before. Rarely in the political limelight, Gosnjak generally has functioned as the leading career military figure in the regime. His political ambitions are unknown. As long as party unity is undermined by national and policy rivalries, however, the army remains a key unifying factor in the regime. Gosnjak must, therefore, be considered a possible successor to Tito as president of Yugoslavia.

The only member of the revamped top leadership who was not a long-time member of the old executive committee is Federal Assembly President Milentije Popovic. Picked in July 1966 to replace Rankovic on the committee, he was elected to the second-ranking government post in April 1967. He is acting president of Yugoslavia in Tito's absence and would become interim president if Tito should die or become incapacitated. Popovic, however, does not have the political muscle to fully replace Tito in the long run.

The Conservative Opposition

By ousting Rankovic and reshuffling the party and government, Tito clearly gave a mandate to the liberal faction of the party to carry out his economic and political reforms. The conservative faction has retained considerable influence, however, because of the power vacuum that followed the reshuffle and Tito's continued reliance on time-tested cronies. This conservative element, which includes many ex-partisans of an older generation, pitches its appeals to retain the prereform status in order to play upon the fears of those who may lose jobs and social position as a result of the reform's emphasis on economic know-how and profitability. The Yugoslav veterans' organization, which Rankovic headed for many years, is full of such potential losers, persons who are often ill-educated and who owe their jobs in the party and administration to partisan service in World War II.

The conservatives use other arguments. They point out that unemployment, a slowdown in industrial growth, and other adverse effects have accompanied the deflationary stabilization introduced by the economic reform. They also have used external issues to buttress their arguments. Out of the Greek coup of April 1967, the Arab-Israeli war, and the war in Vietnam, for example, they have conjured the existence of an "imperialist offensive" aimed at undermining "progressive" regimes, such as Yugoslavia's, by subversion from within and local wars and economic pressures from without. The conservatives have pushed this line by circulating rumors that important backers of the economic reform were subverted by US agents.

The Purge and the Nationality Problem

The liberals finally got their drive started to rid the party of these conservative elements in mid-January 1968 with the start of a purge in the Belgrade city party organization. On 13 January the Yugoslav party control commission announced the expulsion of 400 members. Unlike most expulsions in recent years, which were for nonpayment of dues, absence from meetings and other administrative sins, these expulsions were for opposition to the party line and hence to the reform program. All of those involved were rank-and-file members, for the most part probably minor bureaucrats who are the backbone of the conservative wing of the Serbian party. By putting in their own followers, the liberals evidently hope to control the election of delegates to the republic and Yugoslav party congresses scheduled for October and December 1968. Their goal is the election of a liberal-controlled party central committee which would hold power in practice as well as in theory.

The situation in the Belgrade party, however, illustrates the dilemma Tito faces. The purge is necessary for the continued success of the economic reform, but is bound to offend Serbian sensitivities. These have already been chafed by the ouster of Serbia's champion Rankovic and by the initially adverse effects of the reform on Serbian

economic growth. Conservatism is strongest in Serbia. From the beginning Serbia stood to lose the most from the economic change-over, while its more economically advanced Croatian and Slovenian rivals gained. Even though the purge will spread to all the other republic parties, it will hit Serbia the hardest. Even before the announcement of the clean-up in Belgrade, a rise in Serbian nationalism was evident. In mid-January, about the time 400 members were expelled, the local party denounced the literary periodical Knjizevne Novine for propagating Serbian chauvinism and centralism.

In an effort to restore discipline and unity to the badly split Serbian party, Tito delegated Yugoslav Presidium members Veljko Vlahovic and Petar Stambolic to leading positions in it. Vlahovic was a former Yugoslav party secretary, and Stambolic, until 1967, was premier of Yugoslavia but with roots in the Serbian party. Both men reportedly are unenthusiastic about the regime's

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reform programs, but as old associates of Tito they can be counted on to carry out orders.

Increase in Republic Authority

The increase in prerogatives of the six constituent republics, although one of the goals of the reform, also has complicated the leadership's problems. The first major devolution of power to the republics occurred during the reorganization and purge of the secret police in the latter half of 1966. The creation of federal councils to coordinate policies on justice, social welfare, and labor reflects increasing autonomy in those areas for the republics. Croatia and Slovenia, however, have made bold bids for considerably more local autonomy than the regime probably originally envisaged. Some younger party members in the two republics reportedly have gone so far as to call for the transformation of Yugoslavia into a confederation. It now consists of six federated republics, and two autonomous provinces which are within Serbia.

The resistance to federal efforts to determine the upper levels of taxes illustrates the opposition by Croatia and Slovenia to Belgrade's control. After unsuccessfully opposing the Federal Assembly's decision to establish a 26-percent limit on payroll taxes, the head of the Slovenian government, Stane Kavcic, vowed to use every legal and political means "to strive steadfastly for realization of our demand." At stake, as the two republic regimes see it, is the massive power of the federation, still weighted in favor of the lesser developed republics, to determine the pace of Slovenian and Croatian economic development by federal control of the purse strings.

The Federal Legislature

The move by Kardelj, when he was Federal Assembly president, to increase the legislature's role at the expense of the government has given the assembly only a slightly greater role than before. After Rankovic's fall the limits of permissible debate were expanded. The assembly has forced the withdrawal or revision of government bills and has sharply criticized government policies. In late December 1967, the cabinet was forced to threaten its collective resignation if the assembly did not reach a speedy compromise on several economic measures proposed by the regime. Despite this increase in assertiveness, however, party discipline keeps the assembly in line on important issues.

Further growth of legislative power, however, may not benefit the liberals who initiated the push for greater

parliamentary authority. The April 1967 elections returned to the assembly several conservative opponents of the economic reforms. A glaring example was the election of a partisan war hero in Lazarevac, Serbia, who attempted to set up his own local political machine by exploiting Serbian nationalist sentiment and local economic difficulties. Freer elections and less restrictions on parliament may lead to the formation of more formal party factions based on national rivalries. Such a development between the wars helped set the stage for the breakup of Yugoslavia in 1941.

Outlook

As the purge of unreconstructed conservatives proceeds gradually throughout 1968, the Yugoslav power structure will undergo further changes. Tito's propensity for avoiding showdowns, however, probably will result in only a limited reshuffling of the top party leadership. Most of his trusted long-time associates, such as Kardelj, Gosnjak, Vlahovic, and Todorovic are likely to remain, as well as some influential conservatives. To give the liberals a complete victory by driving out at every level all those who oppose the reforms would create a dissident group outside of party discipline, against which Tito's heirs would be forced to use the very administrative measures many of them deplore.

Tito has maintained his commitment to decentralization of economic and political authority and is likely to continue, unless he comes to believe his own power and the unity of Yugoslavia are imperiled. This basically liberal trend will permit a gradual widening of the limits of debate, and perhaps will lead to a limited amount of popular political choice. Tito's reforms, however, are meant to preserve the party's domination under decentralized conditions and it is unlikely that his purpose is to allow outright questioning of the legitimacy of his regime. Liberalization, as Tito views it, thus will continue to take place within, not outside of, the Yugoslav Communist system.

The smooth and gradual achievement of these changes will require the continued personal direction of Tito. Although he has had many serious medical problems, his stamina enables him to carry on with considerable vigor. If he were to die before the power structure had been adjusted to contain the national and personal rivalries, however, his successors would almost certainly be faced with a period of increasing turmoil.

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